

**REMARKS OF
COMMISSIONER ROBERT M. McDOWELL
OF THE
FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
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[AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY]

Thank you for having me here today. Coming back to MMTC today is bittersweet; it will be the last time I address your terrific group as a Commissioner of the FCC. Over the past almost seven years, I have thoroughly enjoyed working with each and every person who comprises MMTC. Your organization is incredibly thoughtful and persuasive, and it is doing a terrific job making the American communications marketplace a better place. You should continue to work hard for your very noble mission. Although I will miss working with you as a Commissioner, I look forward to helping you in the private sector. Whatever lies ahead for me, I wanted to take this opportunity to say thank you very much. I really do admire your work. And, although I would like to thank everyone, there are way too many people on that list, so I shouldn't even start. It would easily use up my three to five minutes.

As I look at the head table, I note that I am used to this male-female ratio. I don't really think about the "all-female" McDowell office that much. Sometimes people ask me why. It really wasn't by design. I just hired the most qualified people to do the job. And, I have been the net beneficiary of that. They have worked hard to make me look good over the past seven years, and sometimes that has been a challenge. I have experienced remarkably low turnover in my office over seven years and I am proud of that. So, I want to start by acknowledging all of my "iron ladies" – Brigid Calamis, Angela Giancarlo, Rosemary Harold, Tasha Kinney, Christine Kurth, Erin McGrath and Cristina Pauze. By the way, there have been three guys – John Hunter, Nick Alexander and Rafael Fernandez – that have worked in the office too. Thank you! Please give all of them a big hand.

I am really not self-analytical, but I do believe that a lot starts with role models, and there have been many strong women in my family. First, there are my grandmothers. My grandmother McDowell, born Mary Alice Emerson, was born in a shack in Leslie, Arkansas and worked her way up to be a business woman and rancher on the Tex-Mex border. Later in her career, she was a Deputy U.S. Marshall for the Western District of Texas. She spoke very softly, but she carried a badge . . . and a .357 Magnum. My grandmother on my mother's side, Bertha Rose Pendergraft, was born in a shack in Missouri. She pulled herself up by her bootstraps to

become a registered nurse. Ultimately, she became a senior manager of St. John's Hospital in Tulsa, Oklahoma. So, for me, it starts there.

In preparation for these remarks, I talked to my wife, Jennifer – a professional woman herself, my daughter Mary-Shea, and to my current and former team, my iron ladies, and asked what should I do, what should I say. Everyone agreed that I should talk about my mother, Martha Louise Shea McDowell. When you talk about women in media and me, well, the first woman I knew in media was my mom. So I asked Jennifer what I should say about my mom, who passed away about eight years ago, and she suggested that I look at the eulogy that I wrote for her funeral. I will take this opportunity to read a few paragraphs, and I think that will answer a lot of questions that you have about me.

Young Martha's quick mind and intellectual curiosity immediately caught the attention of her doting parents and her uncle, Richard Shea, a Jesuit priest and professor of classical studies. Together with her parents, "Uncle Dick" became a mentor and a driving force in her education. He helped mold the Martha we all came to know and love. Smart but not bookish, she was naturally athletic and loved playing out-of-doors. Early on, she took to tennis, horseback riding and swimming – passions that would last a lifetime.

Strong-willed, competitive and fearless from conception, Martha didn't see mid-Twentieth Century as a man's world. She was fortunate enough to be surrounded by strong, independent-minded women: her mother, who rose to a senior managerial position at St. John's Hospital in Tulsa, and her aunt, Amy Rose Pendergraft, who became one of the highest ranking women in the Army at the time, retiring at the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. They never considered themselves "feminists." Instead, they matter-of-factly set out to satisfy their career ambitions. And they did. Knowing this, it is easier to understand how Martha aspired to stride into the male-dominated realm of journalism with such confidence – a generation ahead of time. But first, she sought to complete her education.

She attended the University of Missouri, where she was accepted into its prestigious School of Journalism. Armed with her rapier wit, razor-edged tongue, movie-star-like beauty and intellectual training by her own personal Jesuit, she became a champion debater. She kicked over a hornet's nest in 1945 when she publicly accused her own sorority, Alpha Delta Pi, of discrimination. A banner headline in the *Columbia Daily Tribune* shouting, "M.U. Sorority Member to Speak against Frat System; Will Ignore Protests of A.D.P. Officers," fell, believe it or not, on the front page above the fold. The *Kansas City Star* echoed the "alarm." The national office of her sorority pressured her to forgo debating the issue on a syndicated radio show or risk expulsion from her chapter. But Martha

didn't back down. Needless to say, the radio debate went on, and the sorority now admits women of all races, colors, creeds and economic backgrounds.

A few months later, she scored her first journalistic coup by being assigned to cover Winston Churchill's now-famous "Iron Curtain" speech in Fulton, Missouri on March 5, 1946 for the *Missourian*. She was not yet 21.

I was fortunate growing up in a family where strong, independent, barrier-breaking women not only served as positive role models for me, but professional women were also the norm. I married a wonderful professional woman who in recent years opted to become a full-time mom. I'm delighted that my daughter is growing up in a world where she will have complete freedom to choose her own destiny.

While others may have thought it noteworthy that my office was mostly female and usually *entirely* female, that scenario never seemed unusual to me. Perhaps Margaret Thatcher, the original Iron Lady, summed it up best when she said, "If you want something said, ask a man; if you want something done, ask a woman."

Again, thank you for having me here today. I am honored to be your only male speaker. And my God bless each one of you.